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United States Department of Agriculture

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.L584
2016



LIVESTOCK PROTECTION DOGS ON PRIVATE LANDS: Protecting Sheep From Predators

Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service
Program Aid No. 2110

AS THE U.S. population grows and continues to spur development throughout the country, new residential communities are springing up in areas that were traditionally only farmed or ranched. Many farms are now surrounded by houses and subdivisions, and once-quiet country roads are being enjoyed by bikers, hikers, and other outdoor enthusiasts. These changes have created new challenges for today's sheep farmers. Getting to know your farming neighbors and whether they use livestock protection dogs (also known as guardian dogs) on their land can help reduce potential problems that may arise between people, domestic pets, and livestock protection dogs.



Photo by Terrianne Warner

Why Do Farmers Use Livestock Protection Dogs?

IF UNPROTECTED, sheep are vulnerable to a variety of predators including coyotes, foxes, wolves, mountain lions, bears, and domestic dogs. Livestock protection dogs are a primary and tradi-

tional means of protecting sheep from predators, and they have become an important means of reducing predator attacks on sheep. These dogs live with the sheep, patrolling the perimeters of sheep grazing areas to ward off potential predators. Livestock protection dogs have been used around the world for centuries and are an essential management tool in the United States. Without them, thousands of sheep and lambs would be injured or killed by predators in the United States every year.

Livestock Protection Dogs on Patrol

IN ORDER for a livestock protection dog to protect its flock, the dog must be free to roam the property to scare away potential predators. Unfortunately, many livestock protection dogs do not understand fence boundaries and will sometimes leave their property as they are chasing away predators. Generally, once the threat to the sheep is gone, the livestock protection dog will return to its flock.

Reducing Conflicts

LIVESTOCK PROTECTION dogs are specially trained working dogs; their job is to protect the sheep. A loose dog running up to a flock of sheep to investigate is considered a predator to a livestock protection dog and may be attacked. If you and your dog do not appear to be a threat, most of the time, livestock protection dogs will just watch you pass by.

Many pet owners don't realize that dogs have a strong instinct to chase livestock—and that a curious or playful dog can do great damage to a

YOUR DOG'S SAFETY MAY BE AT RISK IF YOU LET IT APPROACH SHEEP THAT ARE PROTECTED BY A LIVESTOCK PROTECTION DOG. KEEP YOUR DOG ON A LEASH AND UNDER YOUR CONTROL AT ALL TIMES.

flock of sheep if it begins to chase them. Sheep are easily stressed, which can cause ewes to abort their lambs. So, even small dogs can pose a big danger to sheep. In fact, domestic dogs are more of a threat in many areas to sheep than wild predators. And in most States, dog owners are financially liable if their pet kills or injures livestock.

Sheep farmers do not want your pet dog or hunting dog on their property, and conversely, they want to ensure that their livestock protection dogs remain on their property. This can be challenging because some livestock protection dogs may pursue predators beyond property lines. If you are aware of a livestock protection dog roaming your area, please contact the owner immediately.

Additionally, if you are concerned about whether the presence of a livestock protection dog on adjacent property may impact your ability to hunt, hike, or enjoy the outdoors, please contact the dog's owner prior to the activity to discuss the situation.



Photo by American Sheep Industry

If you encounter a livestock protection dog...

Do:

- ▶ Keep your dog on a leash and never allow your dog to run toward or harass the livestock protection dog(s) or sheep.
- ▶ Remain calm if a livestock protection dog approaches.
- ▶ Tell the livestock protection dog “No” or “Go back to the sheep” in a firm voice.
- ▶ If you are on a bike, stop, dismount, and put the bike between you and the dog(s). Walk your bike until well past the sheep.
- ▶ Keep your distance from the sheep and choose the least disruptive route around them.
- ▶ Contact the dog’s owner immediately if you see a livestock protection dog that has left the property or is away from the sheep.

Do Not:

- ▶ Chase or harass the sheep or dog(s).
- ▶ Approach the dog(s) or sheep.
- ▶ Try to outrun the dog(s).
- ▶ Throw things at the dog(s).
- ▶ Make quick movements.
- ▶ Feed the dog(s).
- ▶ Attempt to befriend or pet the dog(s).
- ▶ Assume the dog is lost and take it with you.

MAY 15 2017

Learn More

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Acquisitions and Metadata Branch

FOR MORE information on the use of livestock
protection dogs, contact:

Wildlife Services

Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service

U.S. Department of Agriculture

866-4USDA-WS (866-487-3297)

www.aphis.usda.gov/wildlife-damage

American Sheep Industry Association

9785 Maroon Circle, Suite 360

Englewood, CO 80112-2692

(303) 771-3500

www.sheepusa.org

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